

53rd



香港藝術節
HK ARTS FESTIVAL
2025

CHRISTIAN
GERHAHER
Vocal Recital



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15.03.2025 / 4:00pm

Concert Hall, Hong Kong City Hall

Approximately one hour and 55 minutes
with one interval

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PLUS 藝術節加料節目

Christian Gerhaer Masterclass

13.03.2025 (Past event)

Contents

Chief Executive's Message

Chairman's Message

Foreword

About Christian Gerhaer

About Gerold Huber

Programme

Programme Notes

About the Hong Kong Arts Festival

Committee and Staff List

Acknowledgements

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Chief Executive's

Message

I am pleased to congratulate the Hong Kong Arts Festival on the organisation of its 2025 season—the 53rd edition of one of the world's most celebrated international cultural events.

This year's Festival brings together over 1,300 international and local artists in some 125 performances covering music, dance, theatre, Chinese and Western opera and much more. The Festival-opening performance, by Italy's Orchestra of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, conducted by Maestro Donato Renzetti, features classic Italian opera arias. Renowned Chinese conductor Lü Jia and the China National Centre for the Performing Arts Orchestra, together with international pianist Zhang Haochen and soprano Song Yuanming, bring the Festival to a close in grand style.

Festival PLUS returns, presenting a wealth of artist-audience events, including masterclasses and workshops, backstage visits, guided cultural tours and more. Besides, the Festival's "Young Friends" programme features school tours, pre-performance talks, arts demonstrations and other special events designed to engage local young people with a world of arts and culture.

The Government is determined to enhance the appeal of Hong Kong's culture. To further solidify Hong Kong's position as a vibrant East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchanges, the Government has launched the Blueprint for Arts and Culture and Creative Industries Development in November 2024, and has been actively working on the 71 measures under four key strategic directions as outlined in the Blueprint.

I am grateful to the Hong Kong Arts Festival and its dedicated team for their unremitting efforts in promoting arts and culture in Hong Kong, throughout the region and around the world. I am grateful, too, to the many sponsors and donors for their generous support for the Festival.

I wish this year's Hong Kong Arts Festival another resplendent season of arts and culture, entertainment and memorable community engagement.



John KC LEE

Chief Executive

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Chairman's Message

A warm welcome to the 53rd Hong Kong Arts Festival. As a leading international performing arts event, the Festival is continuing its mission of enhancing Hong Kong's cultural landscape by showcasing over 1,300 exceptional international and local artists in more than 125 performances of over 45 unique programmes, as well as organising about 300 PLUS and educational activities for the community.

I would like to thank the HKSAR Government, acting through the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, for its annual subvention and matching grant which are not only essential to our operations, but also an important recognition of the work we do. I also want to thank The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust for its unwavering support during the past 53 years, as well as other corporate sponsors, charitable foundations and donors, whose contributions have enabled us to reach out to different sectors of the community and positively impact society through the performing arts.

My deepest gratitude goes to all participating artists for their dedication and exceptional performances. I also thank all HKAF staff, who worked extremely hard to bring this Festival to life.

Most importantly, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all audience members for your participation and support. May you find joy and inspiration in our programmes and events.



Lo Kingman
Chairman
Hong Kong Arts Festival

Supporting
Organisation:



Foreword

Promoting international cultural exchange has always been a key objective of the Hong Kong Arts Festival. This year's Festival continues to invite renowned global masters and internationally recognised young pioneers to present a range of world-class programmes, respecting tradition while encouraging new, innovative initiatives. Many of these works are inspired by classic literature or offer rediscoveries of the original, bringing vibrant artistic experiences to the city.

We will also present a series of programmes centred around “fantasy and adventure”. These include works that seamlessly blend the arts with VR and AR technology, as well as captivating new creations that draw on traditional puppetry and circus performances. The Festival will also continue to support local artists and encourage exchanges to foster a vibrant and diversified platform for the arts.

We also remain dedicated to advancing arts education and audience building. Our PLUS programmes will present a series of thoughtfully curated masterclasses, backstage visits, post-performance artist talks and an exhibition. And our Young Friends and educational activities will continue to offer multi-dimensional arts experiences to students.

We hope that you will enjoy this year's arts extravaganza prepared by the Hong Kong Arts Festival team.



Flora Yu
Executive Director
Hong Kong Arts Festival

The Hong Kong Arts Festival is made possible with the funding support of:



[Contents](#)

[About
Christian Gerhaher](#)

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Performers' Profiles

Baritone

Christian Gerhaher



During his studies under Paul Kuën and Raimund Grumbach, German baritone Christian Gerhaher attended the opera school of the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich, where he studied Lied interpretation with Friedemann Berger. While completing his medical studies, Gerhaher perfected his vocal training in masterclasses given by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Inge Borkh. At present Gerhaher, together with his regular piano accompanist Gerold Huber, holds a class in Lied interpretation at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich, and occasionally also teaches at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

With Huber, Gerhaher has devoted himself to Lied interpretation for more than 30 years, in concerts and recordings, and over the years they have been awarded several major prizes. The duo regularly appears on the stages of major international recital centres, for instance in the concert halls of New York, the Muziekgebouw and Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Cité de la Musique in Paris, the Konzerthaus and Musikverein in Vienna, the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid, La Scala in Milan, Wigmore Hall in London, and alongside the Cologne, Luxembourg and Berlin philharmonic orchestras.

Gerhaher and Huber perform regularly at festivals in Munich, Aix, Heidelberg, Salzburg, Granada, Berlin, Lucerne, Edinburgh, Rheingau and Schleswig-Holstein. The Liedwoche Elmau, founded by Gerhaher and Huber, took place for the third time in September 2023.

[Contents](#)

[About Gerold Huber](#)

Piano

Gerold Huber



In addition to two solo CDs featuring works by Beethoven and Schumann, pianist Gerold Huber has released numerous outstanding CD recordings together with Christian Gerhaher, all of which have received several awards and critical acclaim for the duo's congenial and symbiotic partnership. Huber's extensive discography also includes recordings with Günther Groissböck (of Schubert on Decca), Bernarda Fink (of Schubert on Harmonia Mundi France), with Ruth Ziesak (of Liszt on Berlin Classics, of Haydn and Mahler/Zemlinsky on Capriccio and of Mendelssohn on AVI), with Maximilian Schmitt (of Clara and Robert Schumann on Oehms Classics), with Christina Landshamer (of Schumann on Oehms Classics) and with Franz-Josef Selig (Lieder by Schubert, Strauss and Wolf on AVI).

Huber is a sought-after teacher and hosts selected masterclasses at venues including Yale University, the Aldeburgh Festival, the Schwetzingen Festival and at Schubert Week in the Pierre Boulez Hall in Berlin. Since 2013, Huber has served as a Professor of Lied Accompaniment at the University of Music Würzburg and in March 2022, together with Gerhaher, started serving in the same position at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich.

[Contents](#)

[Programme](#)

Programme

Robert Schumann (1810-56)

Fünf Lieder, Op 40

- “Märzveilchen”
- “Muttertraum”
- “Der Soldat”
- “Der Spielmann”
- “Verratene Liebe”

Liederkreis, Op 39

- “In der Fremde I”
- “Intermezzo”
- “Waldesgespräch”
- “Die Stille”
- “Mondnacht”
- “Schöne Fremde”
- “Auf einer Burg”
- “In der Fremde II”
- “Wehmut”
- “Zwielicht”
- “Im Walde”
- “Frühlingsnacht”

INTERVAL

Drei Gesänge, Op 83

- “Resignation”
- “Die Blume der Ergebung”
- “Der Einsiedler”

Romanzen und Balladen, Op 53

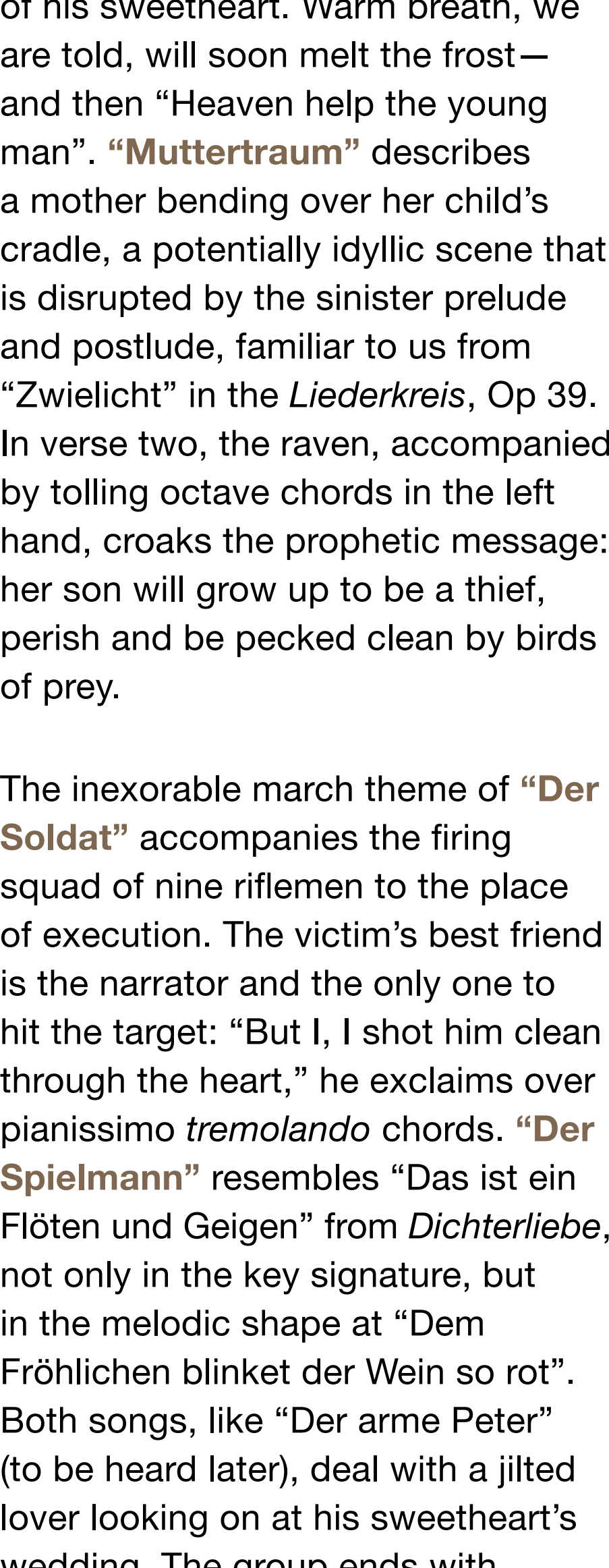
- “Blondel’s Lied”
- “Loreley”
- “Der arme Peter”
 - I. Der Hans und die Grete tanzen herum
 - II. In meiner Brust, da sitzt ein Weh
 - III. Der arme Peter wankt vorbei

Sechs Gedichte und Requiem, Op 90

- “Lied eines Schmiedes”
- “Meine Rose”
- “Kommen und Scheiden”
- “Die Sennin”
- “Einsamkeit”
- “Der schwere Abend”
- “Requiem”

Programme Notes

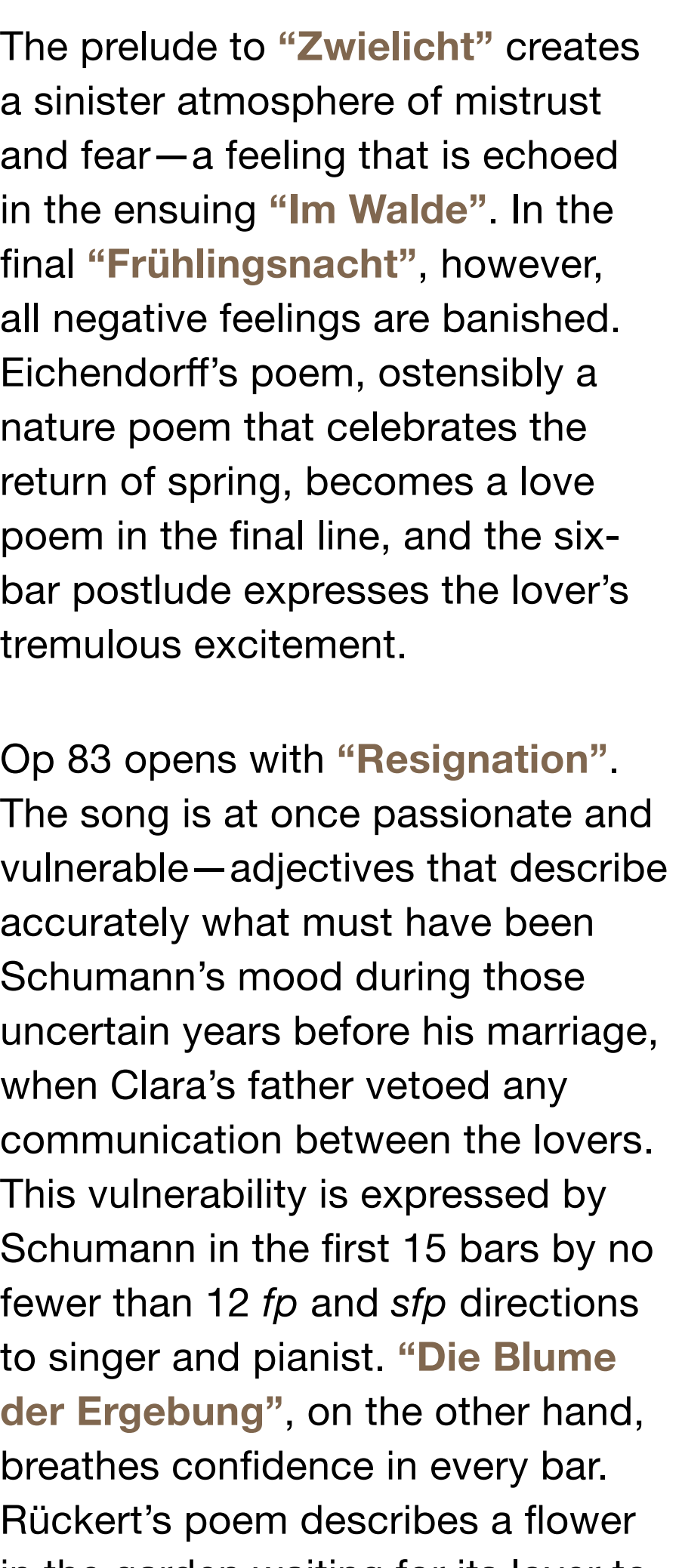
Robert Schumann composed in all the main musical genres of the time and wrote songs throughout his entire career. His earliest Lieder date from 1827 and 1828, settings of a poem of his own “Sehnsucht” and others by Byron, Goethe, Jacobi and Kerner. Twelve years later, having spent a decade perfecting the art of writing lyrical piano pieces, he composed about 140 songs, most of them masterpieces—an astonishing output that was inspired to a great extent by his love for Clara Wieck. His next important years of song (1849-52) were characterised by a less lyrical, more introspective style. This evening’s recital features Op 39, 40 and “Der arme Peter” from 1840; and Op 83 and 90 from 1850.



Robert Schumann (1810-56)

Adelbert von Chamisso, the poet of Schumann’s “Frauenliebe und-leben”, was also a skilled translator, as Op 40 reveals. “**Märzveilchen**” tells of a young man peering through a frost-patterned window, trying to make out the laughing violet eyes of his sweetheart. Warm breath, we are told, will soon melt the frost—and then “Heaven help the young man”. “**Muttertraum**” describes a mother bending over her child’s cradle, a potentially idyllic scene that is disrupted by the sinister prelude and postlude, familiar to us from “Zwielicht” in the *Liederkreis*, Op 39. In verse two, the raven, accompanied by tolling octave chords in the left hand, croaks the prophetic message: her son will grow up to be a thief, perish and be pecked clean by birds of prey.

The inexorable march theme of “**Der Soldat**” accompanies the firing squad of nine riflemen to the place of execution. The victim’s best friend is the narrator and the only one to hit the target: “But I, I shot him clean through the heart,” he exclaims over pianissimo *tremolando* chords. “**Der Spielmann**” resembles “Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen” from *Dichterliebe*, not only in the key signature, but in the melodic shape at “Dem Fröhlichen blinket der Wein so rot”. Both songs, like “Der arme Peter” (to be heard later), deal with a jilted lover looking on at his sweetheart’s wedding. The group ends with “**Verratene Liebe**” which sets a modern Greek poem in translation. The accompaniment is marked “lightly” and the voice, at first almost unaccompanied, gradually increases in tempo and volume, as news of the lovers’ kiss spreads through nature. The delightful postlude ends with a sort of chromatically decorated arpeggio that seems to giggle at the extraordinary events.



Title page of the first edition of the score of *Liederkreis* (1842)

Although the Eichendorff *Liederkreis* is Schumann’s only cycle to bear no dedication on the title page, it’s clear that Clara was the inspiration behind this outpouring. Schumann’s choice of poems, however, instead of solely mirroring his love for his bride-to-be, reflects the complexity of his Eusebius/Florestan polar personality. The melancholy “**In der Fremde I**” is followed by “**Intermezzo**” that the 23-year-old Eichendorff addressed to Luise von Larisch. The hunting horns in the prelude of “**Waldesgespräch**” return us to the threatening world of danger. “**Die Stille**” (from Eichendorff’s novel *Ahnung und Gegenwart*) is a wonderfully tender evocation of a young woman’s secret love for a man of higher birth. Schumann’s repeated motif of descending fifths in the piano’s left hand of “**Mondnacht**” reads E-H-E—“marriage” in German notation. Cryptology was dear to Schumann’s heart and his message must have been crystal clear to Clara, who had already received a letter from him, in which he described “Ehe” as “ein sehr musikalisches Wort”, a very musical term.

The romantic mood, continued in “**Schöne Fremde**”, is punctured in “**Auf einer Burg**”, which describes the legendary old knight Barbarossa sitting inside his mountain retreat, ready to protect his country in time of need. But to Schumann, Barbarossa was surely Friedrich Wieck (“auf der Lauer”/“on guard”), protecting his daughter whom he wishes to marry a man she does not love. The second “**In der Fremde II**” speaks of the impossibility of recapturing a love that has died and this is followed by the overwhelmingly sad “**Wehmut**”, sung in *Ahnung und Gegenwart* by Erwine, who, having saved the life of young Count Friedrich, falls in love with him and, disguised as Erwin, follows him on his romantic adventures. She sings arcanelly of her love in “Die Stille”, but when finally convinced she will never win him, she decides to commit suicide by drowning herself in the Rhine—before which she sings “Wehmut”, one of Schumann’s loveliest melodies.

The prelude to “**Zwielicht**” creates a sinister atmosphere of mistrust and fear—a feeling that is echoed in the ensuing “**Im Walde**”. In the final “**Frühlingsnacht**”, however, all negative feelings are banished. Eichendorff’s poem, ostensibly a nature poem that celebrates the return of spring, becomes a love poem in the final line, and the six-bar postlude expresses the lover’s tremulous excitement.

Op 83 opens with “**Resignation**”. The song is at once passionate and vulnerable—adjectives that describe accurately what must have been Schumann’s mood during those uncertain years before his marriage, when Clara’s father vetoed any communication between the lovers. This vulnerability is expressed by Schumann in the first 15 bars by no fewer than 12 *fp* and *sfp* directions to singer and pianist. “**Die Blume der Ergebung**”, on the other hand, breathes confidence in every bar. Rückert’s poem describes a flower in the garden waiting for its lover to appear, and the beautiful melody of the serene piano prelude and its subsequent development catches the girl’s quiet confidence to perfection.

“**Der Einsiedler**”, the final number of Op 83, is one of the finest of all late Schumann songs. The hermit in the poem sings of night’s coming and the peace that night will bring. The first stanza talks of the present; the second of the past and how night once brought comfort when he was afflicted with sadness; and the final verse moves the poem beyond a concern with any one particular night, envisaging a comfort that is linked with an eternal dawn and which is heard in the literally tremulous rapture of Schumann’s final bar.

The refrain of “**Blondels Lied**”, composed in October 1840 a few weeks after Schumann’s marriage to Clara, runs “Suche treu, so findest du!”—a phrase that must have had special significance for the happy couple. They too had been separated for years by the obduracy and machinations of the litigious Friedrich Wieck. Seidl’s poem tells the story of Richard the Lionheart: how he was captured, held for ransom by Leopold of Austria, rescued and released by his minstrel Blondel who, having found his king, rides home in the final stanza to collect the ransom money.

“**Loreley**”, written by Schumann’s sister-in-law, Wilhelmine Lorenz, refers obliquely to the legend of the beautiful temptress who, on a rocky promontory on the right bank of the Rhine, lured boatmen to their death on the rocks below. Because of Wieck’s implacable resistance to his daughter marrying a mere composer, Schumann seemed involuntarily drawn to poems that depicted unhappiness at weddings, such as “**Der arme Peter**”, the final song (or rather trilogy) of Op 53. Two jangling chords, reminiscent of a hurdy-gurdy, set the scene of this unhappy tale of rejection, which ends in the third song with the suggestion of a funeral march.

Schumann’s Lenau settings from Op 90 are among the most lugubrious in the repertoire. In the opening “**Lied eines Schmiedes**” from *Faust*, the smithy hammers away at the forge (on-the-beat accented chords in the right hand, off-the-beat accented chords in the left), as he prepares Faust’s horse for his imminent journey. The words of “**Meine Rose**” express the poet’s wish silently to pour out his soul to succour his sweetheart—Sophie von Loewenthal—in the same way that water can revive a rose. The drooping melodies in the voice and piano suggest, however, that his efforts will be in vain.

Clara and Robert Schumann, illustration from *Famous Composers and their Works*, Vol. 2, 1906

“**Die Sennin**”, despite a succession of bright F sharps suggestive of cowbells and yodelling, ends on a melancholy note—one day, we are told, death or marriage will snatch the cowgirl away. The chromatic, introspective style of “**Kommen und Scheiden**”, “**Einsamkeit**” and “**Der schwere Abend**” suggests that Schumann had a deep understanding of the poet who by 1850 had already spent years in a mental asylum—as Schumann himself was also soon to do at Enderich. There is a frightening congruity of mood between poet and composer in “**Der schwere Abend**”, where the sultry key of E-flat minor and the figure in the accompaniment recall “Ich hab’ im Traum geweinet” from *Dichterliebe*. “Einsamkeit” also hangs heavily in E-flat minor, with three pages of descending quavers which distil the essence of Lenau’s obsessively melancholic poem.

Schumann was convinced, when composing these songs, that Lenau had already died and “**Requiem**” was appended to the work as a tribute to the “dead” poet.

Text: Richard Stokes

[Contents](#)

[About the HKAF](#)



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About the Hong Kong Arts Festival

Launched in 1973, the **Hong Kong Arts Festival** is a major international arts festival committed to enriching the cultural life of the city. In February and March every year, the Festival presents leading local and international artists in all genres of the performing arts, placing equal importance on great traditions and contemporary creations. The Festival also commissions and produces work in Cantonese opera, theatre, music, chamber opera and contemporary dance by Hong Kong's creative talent and emerging artists; many of these works have had successful subsequent runs in Hong Kong and overseas. The Festival also presents "PLUS" and educational activities that bring a diverse range of arts experiences to the community as well as tertiary, secondary and primary school students. In addition, through the "No Limits" project co-presented with The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Festival strives to create an inclusive space for people with different abilities to share the joys of the arts together.

The HKAF is a non-profit organisation. The total estimated income for FY2024/25 (including the 53rd Hong Kong Arts Festival and 2025 "No Limits") is approximately HK\$150 million. Current Government annual baseline funding accounts for around 12% of the Festival's total income. Around 23% of the Festival's income needs to come from the box office, and around 45% from sponsorship and donations made by corporations, individuals and charitable foundations. The remaining 20% is expected to come from other revenue sources including the Government's matching grant scheme, which matches income generated through private sector sponsorship and donations.

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<https://www.hk.artsfestival.org/en/about-us/index.html?>



[Audience Survey](#)

[Contents](#)

[Committee and Staff List](#)

Committee and Staff List



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[Contents](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

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